

## Update: Response to the Tsunami Disaster



A young couple next to the ruin of their home; their youngest child died in the tsunami.

The aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunamis continues to unfold. In India, immediate relief efforts are proceeding well, particularly in more accessible areas, such as the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu. Still, tens of thousands of people are suffering with grief from lost loved ones, loss of property and livelihoods, and the trauma of the events. Whole “identities” have been wiped out, according to one disaster expert. With no paperwork or anything tangible left to mark a human life, even claiming personal identity can be a struggle. Region-wide, more than 155,000 are reported dead in all affected countries.

### Situation

The tsunamis cut a wide swath, affecting South Asia, Southeast Asia and parts of Africa. Indonesia and Sri Lanka – deeply devastated by the events – face multiple and complex recovery and rehabilitation challenges. The magnitude of disaster is massive and emerging symptoms of discontent about the handling of relief could create obstacles to recovery. In Sri Lanka, more than 30,000 people are dead, almost 5,000 are missing and nearly half a million are displaced. In Indonesia, numbers of dead have climbed to 104,000, with 10,000 missing and more than 650,000 homeless. Governments acknowledge that those missing are not likely to be found.

India was hardest hit in Tamil Nadu and the territory of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Human losses of more than 10,000 and physical damage are significant, yet swift and steady emergency response from state and local government officials in Tamil Nadu helped people get access to life-saving clean water and other basic needs. Local, Indian-based non-governmental organizations (NGOs) played a key role in immediate relief and are transitioning



into recovery and rehabilitation efforts. The U.S. Government (USG), via USAID India, now supports recovery initiatives valued at \$2.8 million (and expects to commit more than \$3.1 million to the recovery program). Implementing partners include the India-based operations of CARE, Catholic Relief Services, World Vision and Project Concern International (see below). These commitments follow Ambassador Mulford's immediate disaster declaration that allowed a rapid \$100,000 disbursement to the Indian Prime Minister's Relief Fund and the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent for short-term emergency response.

President Bush, speaking to USAID employees and NGOs involved in the tsunami response at USAID headquarters on January 10 said: "The international community has responded with generosity and compassion, and the men and women of USAID have been at the center of the response...They have been working in the region day and night, 24 hours a day, and America is grateful." He made a long-term commitment to the affected region to help Asian and African people "get back on their feet."

### **Field Assessment in India**



Damaged boats in the harbor of Nagappattinam, one of the hardest hit areas of Tamil Nadu. Repairing or replacing fishing vessels is key to recovering livelihoods.

The relief and recovery agenda in India was shaped through close coordination with local government, NGOs and countless interviews and focus groups with Indian men, women and children. USAID deployed a four-member disaster assistance response team (DART) to Tamil Nadu on December 29 to gather information and sift through possible recovery approaches. During their 11-day visit in hard hit areas, USAID American and Indian staff sent back daily field reports, met with district officials to keep tabs on coordination of relief efforts and observed the personal and physical costs of the disaster.

"We have seen a dynamic and effective response from the government of Tamil Nadu," says Rebecca Scheurer, a member of the DART. "Humanitarian relief efforts are helping people return to normal life."

According to the DART, coastal access to inland areas and systems untouched by the tidal waves boosted relief, combined with a strong local government response. There are no public health threats. Water and sanitation work is focused on filling the gaps between what municipal water systems can handle and ensuring safe drinking water in potentially contaminated wells. Partners are focusing on recovering livelihoods, erecting safe temporary shelters and dealing with the psychological trauma of the disaster.



Affects on children orphaned by the event – including the potential risk of trafficking of youngsters – are of high concern to the U.S. Government. No issues of exploitation were documented by the field team.

One USAID Foreign Service National (FSN) was sent to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands to monitor the situation in this highly affected area. The Government of India (GOI) has not allowed foreigners access to the island territory since the event. The FSN's first-person accounts of life in this remote area have provided valuable information to the American relief community. The GOI recently announced that local and national NGOs will be allowed to operate in the territory, but foreign staff will not be able to work outside of the capital of Port Blair. Wider access to the territories should quicken the pace of recovery.

### **Funded Efforts in India**



Rebuilding temporary shelters in Cuddalore municipality.

Efforts funded by USAID include:

- A cash-for-work program led by World Vision India will construct 2,500 temporary shelters, under a nearly \$900,000 grant, while providing families the opportunity to earn money to meet other household needs.
- A grant of more than \$440,000 to Project Concern International, India, will fund recovery and rehabilitation in four villages. Activities include building temporary shelters; repairing boats for the fishing industry; starting "cash-for-work" options for men, women and young adults related to disaster clean-up; and organizing child day care centers, so mothers can re-establish households or seek income opportunities, and children can heal from the trauma.
- Grants of \$650,000 to CARE (India), and \$750,000 to Catholic Relief Services (India) are ensuring potable water and sanitation services for Indians.

### **Staying Informed, and How to Help**

Updates, press releases and photos from the field are available via USAID India's web site at [www.usaid.gov/in](http://www.usaid.gov/in) .

For region-wide information, and advice on how to contribute to relief efforts, go to USAID's one-stop comprehensive site for disaster-related information at [www.usaid.gov](http://www.usaid.gov), and click on "Tsunami Relief." Cash donations to NGOs and United Nations agencies recognized by the development community are advised. Emergency clothing and hygiene supplies are less helpful at this stage of recovery.

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